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from Entrance Island—a sort of resinous pine, with hard sound wood of a teak colour. This leads me to remark that the mangroves of the Victoria River are mere brush generally, not growing to a height of over 6 feet, and of no use whatever as firewood. The writer of the ‘Handbook of the Northern Territory’ must have been thinking of the Adelaide River, where the mangroves grow tall and straight like pines, and to a height of 80 and 100 feet without a branch, when he mentions the mangrove-forests at the mouth of the Victoria; the fact being that the said forests are hardly visible from a ship’s deck at 4 miles’ distance. I have generally found that sand kills off the mangrove-trees altogether, and from its mouth to Palm Island the banks of the Victoria are sandy.

As a navigable river, I consider the Adelaide to be far superior to the Victoria. In the former, a vessel of the size and draught of the *Beatrice* can ascend nearly 80 miles, into fresh water, with perfect safety. In the Victoria, the same vessel could not get much farther than Holdfast Bay, without great risk; and Mosquito Flat, at this season, is not passable by large boats except at spring-tides. There is a great difference in the soil of the two rivers, the Adelaide being clayey and muddy, and the Victoria sandy. I do not pretend to have any idea as to which is the best for this climate, but the land about the Victoria certainly looks the best, that is, above Mosquito Flat. I notice one great difference: whereas the water which falls on the plains of the Adelaide appears to remain stagnant, until dried up by the sun or filtered through the soil, the rainfalls on the Whirlwind Plains, and above them, seems to run at once off in violent torrents—which cause the numerous small but deep watercourses I have spoken of before.

On the morning of the 4th of September, we ran from Blunder Bay, with a fair wind, in company with the *Julia*, and got as far as the point off Forsyth Creek. The same evening, the tide having risen 22 feet, the *Julia* left us to make the best of her way back to Escape Cliff, the Government Resident going on with us to Timor.

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XVII.—*Notes on the West Coast of Madagascar.* By Captain J. C. WILSON, R.N.

THE Island of Madagascar is little known except through the excellent works written by the Rev. Mr. Ellis; and in those works we find but slight mention of the western coast, which I purpose to form the subject of this paper.

From the geographical position of the island, lying as it does across the trade-winds, the climate and general features of the east and west sides materially differ. The west is peopled by the Sacalava tribes, who may be looked upon as quite as distinct a

nation from the Hovas as the Norwegians are from the Swedes. The trade-wind seldom blows home with any great strength; which is fortunate, as the east coast is very deficient in sheltered harbours (if we except the bays at the north-east end), the best being only protected from the sea by reefs, but exposed to the wind. The wind gradually trends in the direction of the land, as you near the extremes of the island, blowing with such force round Cape Amber, that vessels seldom attempt to face it. The current divides in about  $18^{\circ}$  s., one part taking a northerly direction along the coast, sweeping past Cape Amber at the rate of 3 knots an hour, forming a southern eddy down the western shore, and the other running, though with less velocity, round Cape St. Mary's. The east coast is often stormy, and generally wet, being the weather; whereas the west is calm and dry, being the lee shore. The latter is also thickly fringed with fine harbours and bays, though as yet but imperfectly surveyed, and but little known. The Hovas are nominally the dominant race, but the Sacalavas are, in fact, quite independent; and the only military post held by the former along this coast is a fortress of no great importance, situated so as to command the entrance of Bunbatooka Bay. The town of Majunga lies at the foot of the hill on which this fort stands, and is commercially the most important on the coast. From this, several cargoes, consisting of ebony, logwood, rosewood, beeswax, hides, and other valuable articles, are yearly exported in American and Hamburg vessels; a considerable quantity is also carried to the Bombay market by dhows.

The French likewise have a brisk trade between the different ports and their military colonies of Nos Beh and Mayotta; and some enterprising merchants have from time to time taken up their quarters on the coast. When last I visited St. Augustine's Bay (on the south-west end of the island), we found that a flourishing trade in salted beef had been opened to supply the Bourbon and Mauritius markets; and, from the cheapness of cattle, it must have proved a highly remunerative speculation. Hides are not so plentiful as might be expected, owing to the custom amongst the natives of cutting up and selling their meat with the skin on. The import slave-trade is still carried on (though to no great extent) from the East Coast of Africa in Arab dhows. These vessels take in their slaves probably somewhere about Angora River, cross over to Cape St. Andrew's, and exchange them for cattle (at the rate of four head of cattle for one slave) with the neighbouring petty chiefs; these are again sold to the French, at Nos Beh, after which they go to Ozsanga (a fine large bay and river abreast of that island) and load with rice, which cargo is taken to Zanzibar or Quiloa; if to the latter port, they would probably add a number of slaves for Zanzibar or the north.

The Sacalavas are the finest race of savages I have ever seen, being superior to the Hovas in appearance, but not nearly so intelligent. They are strongly built, tall, independent fellows, with the African cast of countenance, though generally much better looking. All carry the flint-musket, which is most carefully kept, the stock highly ornamented with brass nails, and well polished. As enemies they are not to be despised, being capital shots, as the French well know from experience on more than one occasion. Large quantities of rice are annually grown and exported, more particularly from the marshy country about Ozsanga River; but on the whole the natives are more pastoral than agricultural in their habits. The houses, like all others I have seen in Madagascar, are beautifully clean and comfortable, and constructed like those on the other side of the island. Morality here is at a low standard, virtue being unknown amongst women; though it must be said, that when married they are constant to their husbands. It is strange that this deplorable state should be so universal throughout this beautiful island, and that, though in many respects superior to other coloured nations, in this they are so far beneath them. If the French carry out their long-cherished desire, of making Madagascar a dependency, I am convinced that Bembatooka Bay would be the point from which they will penetrate into the interior. A few thousand troops, assisted by the North Sacalavas, who could easily be induced to join them, would, without much difficulty, march on the capital (Tananarivo), from whence they could govern the island with ease. Tananarivo is situated on the highlands, and therefore most healthy. Majunga (in Bembatooka Bay) is the nearest point (where troops could be disembarked) to the capital, possessing a safe and commodious anchorage, and the country round about capable of furnishing large supplies of provisions. From the imperfect way in which the coast has been surveyed, it is most dangerous to navigate; and past experience teaches us that, in the event of shipwreck, the natives are not to be trusted. Steamers ere long will open up this part of the world, when the value of Madagascar will be fully appreciated. The coal-beds known to exist on the north-west end of the island, and situated at no great distance from the fine harbours before referred to, will then become valuable, and one great difficulty in the navigation of the Mozambique Channel overcome. In these days of cattle-plague may we not take a hint from the enterprising French trader, and establish factories where beef could be salted for our home market? I believe it could, with advantage to the speculator and this country generally.

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